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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

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THE REV. GEORGE ADAM SMITH, D.D., PROFESSOR  
OF HEBREW IN THE FREE CHURCH COLLEGE,  
GLASGOW, SCOTLAND.

By PROFESSOR ALEXANDER BALMAIN BRUCE,  
Free Church College, Glasgow.

GEORGE ADAM SMITH was born in India in the year 1856. He came to Scotland in early boyhood and received his education in the Royal High School, Edinburgh, and afterwards in the university of the same city, where he graduated in 1875. He took his theological curriculum in the New College, Edinburgh, passing the exit examination with distinction in 1879. During the period of four years covered by the theological course, through which all Free Church students have to pass, Mr. Smith twice visited German universities, taking a summer semester in Tübingen in 1876 and a second in Leipsic in 1878. After finishing his theological course he visited the East, spending six months, from December, 1879, till May, 1880, in Egypt and the Holy Land. On returning to Scotland he was appointed to act as Hebrew tutor in the Free Church College, Aberdeen, the duties of which office he performed for two successive sessions 1880-1, 1881-2. This appointment fell to his lot in connection with the unhappy trial of Professor Robertson Smith for the promulgation of critical views on the Old Testa-



GEORGE ADAM SMITH

ment, which at the time appeared to many as "dangerous and unsettling." An incident of the trial was the suspension of the incriminated Professor from his teaching functions, making the appointment of a substitute necessary.

This temporary position led to something more permanent in the "granite city." At the time that Mr. Smith was discharging his duties as Hebrew tutor in the college a movement was on foot to form a new congregation in the west end of Aberdeen, not far from where the college buildings stand. The people who were interested in this movement got their eye on him, having discovered that he could preach as well as teach. The result was that in 1882 he became the pastor of Queen's Cross Church. This position he occupied for ten years, that is, till his appointment to the chair of Hebrew in the Free Church College, Glasgow, in 1892.

During these ten years of his pastoral life Mr. Smith was not only successful in building up a strong, influential congregation, but became famous as a preacher. He came to be regarded as one of the foremost, if not the very foremost, man among the younger ministry of his church. Hence it was that the congregation of Free St. George's, Edinburgh, by a long way the first in the denomination, on the outlook for a colleague to their able minister, Dr. Whyte, pitched upon him as the man of all the men they could think of likely to occupy that prominent post with advantage to them and to the city at large. Had they been unanimous they would probably have succeeded in getting him. None doubted his powers or his eloquence, but some doubted his orthodoxy. "Was he not tainted with those dreadful critical views for which Professor Robertson Smith had suffered deprivation of office?" And so, a minority somewhat obstinately opposing, Mr. Smith preferred to remain where he was, ministering to a united and attached people. Many have been and are of opinion that in this way he lost the opportunity of serving his church and his generation in the way most suitable to his gifts. And beyond doubt, while possessing ample learning and proved teaching capacity, he is before all things by gifts and temperament a preacher.

As some one facetiously remarked, while he doubtless is a first-class professor he is a *double first* preacher. Many qualities combine to make him a rare pulpit power; poetic feeling, imagination, passion, a good presence, a fine voice, graceful utterance, and withal something to say on any theme he discourses on worth listening to. He has, however, crossed the Rubicon. He will be a professor for the rest of his life, and it is confidently expected that he will have a distinguished career in this new line. Even after his appointment to the chair the St. George's people thought it not impossible that they might be able to lure him away from Hebrew roots to Christian homiletics, but they have at last given up hope and called another man, who it is believed will serve them very well, if not as well.

Mr. Smith—Dr. Smith I must call him now (he got his degree from Edinburgh within a twelvemonth of his appointment to the chair)—has made his mark in authorship as decidedly as in preaching. He gave to the world his first important publication in the year 1888, while still the minister of King's Cross. It was the first volume of his well known and highly valued work on the Prophet *Isaiah*, the second of which appeared in 1890. That work may be said to be a pioneer sample of a kind of literature very much wanted at present—popular readable exposition of Scripture based on modern scientific Biblical criticism. Its success as a publication was partly due to the fact that it met a generally felt want. But it was due also, and even chiefly, to the fact of its being a splendid specimen of the kind of literature in demand. It is criticism and high-class homiletics combined; the former competent, the latter brilliant. The book is from beginning to end readable, both for scholars, and for common men, as its contents had been hearable by all classes when preached. For preached it was, another specimen of the superior style of pulpit work which the best class of Scottish ministers do for the instruction and entertainment of their audiences. Of men who can turn out work of such high quality there are never many in any church, but there are always some to keep up the prophetic succession and feed

the reflective minds of many devout people who like to read something more solid and improving than novels. There are churches in Scotland in reference to which the passer-by will now and then remark to a companion: That is the church in which such and such a book was first preached. Long may it continue to be so.

The work by which Professor Smith would perhaps wish to be judged by scholars is his more recently published *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, which appeared in 1894, and was at once welcomed by competent authorities as an important contribution to the subject. It rises, of course, far above the level of ordinary books on the Holy Land, which by their number and their nature might well scare a wise man into a virtuous resolution to let alone a theme so hackneyed. I have never been in Palestine, but so many have been there and have talked and written about it so much that I don't want to go. Even if I did I have small chance. I once said in somewhat bitter jest that any minister might get a trip to the Holy Land on *sick leave*, and that a *saint* might get there without being sick, but that as I was neither sick or saintly I must do without. All the same I recognize that if a man wants to write a book on the geography of a country he had better see it first. Dr. Smith was not content with the visit he made to Palestine in 1879. He visited it a second time in 1891, with a special reference to the geographical study he had then on hand; and one can see in the volume which embodies the results of the study interesting reminiscences of the visit in the shape of extracts from a diary written on the spot.

Dr. Smith's work, as its name imports, is an endeavor to throw light on the history of events, especially military events, in Palestine, by a careful study of its geographical features, the historical incidents recorded in Scripture of course receiving prominent, but by no means exclusive attention. It thus breaks comparatively new ground. Robinson's well known *Researches* has for its main task the identification of places, in which department of enquiry it is of epoch-making importance. Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine* is an admirable attempt to throw light on

Scriptural allusions by careful vivid descriptions of the localities. Kinglake's *Eothen* aims at shutting off Scripture associations, and trying to see the Holy Land, as if it had no particular sanctity, as it might appear to an observing Pagan eye; a characteristic which made its appearance welcome to many who were weary of second-rate productions stuffed with commonplace pious reflections on sacred scenes and incidents. Furrer's "Wanderungen" are a picturesque reproduction of the main features of the country, geographical, physical and social, by one who did Palestine on foot with an eye in his head and a knapsack on his back; in many respects a book unique in interest, by its fine poetic feeling and simple felicity of style. For the purpose of identifying old sites you must still go to Robinson, or to those who have followed in his track. Professor Smith does comparatively little in this line. He appears to have small taste for such enquiries, and to be of opinion that they have already been carried on to an excessive extent, or at least in too confident a spirit. Neither will his work supersede that of Stanley, which, though it may now be behind date in some respects, continues to be a book of real value to all biblical students. The lyric spirit which pervades Furrer's contribution would make it, not, indeed a rival to Dr. Smith's, but certainly, were it translated into English, a welcome addition to ministerial and other libraries. While leaving to such works as these their legitimate sphere Dr. Smith offers something distinctive: not antiquarian investigation into the claims of particular spots to be sites of historic towns, not a running commentary on biblical texts, not photographic pictures of what can be seen from selected view-points—Pisgah views in various directions—not any of these, but a comprehensive idea of Palestine as a whole, with careful description of its separate parts in their organic relation to the whole, and in connection with the historic drama enacted on the soil. His work is scientific in conception, execution, and spirit. Only it is not dry science, but science relieved and popularized by a graphic style and by eloquence stirred by the terror and pathos of Israel's eventful story in a highly sensitive mind. It has been said indeed that the book is too eloquent. If that be so the fault will be pardoned, in the

first place as the defect of the author's qualities, in the next place as making the work readable, but chiefly because on second thoughts the fault is seen to be a virtue. For who could fitly handle the *historical* geography of Palestine that came to his task in a dry-as-dust spirit, devoid of imagination and poetry, prosaically describing its physical features without electric thrills communicated by the heroisms of which it was the theater. The thrills, doubtless, must be kept in their own place, but without them a book on such a theme would be simply dead-born.

It would be out of place in this biographical sketch to offer an elaborate critique of this important volume. In so far as my own impressions are concerned I shall content myself with stating that, while the book interested me throughout, what has left the most vivid recollection in my mind is the part which gives an account of the *Shephelah*,<sup>1</sup> that is, the tract of hill country lying between the great central plateau and the level plain bordering on the Mediterranean, "the debatable ground between Israel and the Philistines, between the Maccabees and the Syrians, between Saladin and the Crusaders." It may interest readers and serve as a guide to the use of the book if I quote here the estimate formed of it by an expert like Dr. Emil Schürer, author of the well-known work on the *Jewish People in the Time of Christ*. In a notice in the *Theologische Literatur Zeitung*, March, 1895, he writes: "Its aim is to show how the history of the land is conditioned by its physical characteristics. . . . Large sections are devoted to a description of these: the conformation of the surface-hills, plains, river-courses, natural highways, climate, products. Then it is shown how these influenced the history. . . . The author devotes special attention to military operations. One might occasionally think it was an officer who wrote, regarding the country from the strategic view-point. . . . The author has a special gift of vivid presentation. He sets the history before the eye like a drama, which he has been enabled to do partly by a twofold visit to the country. The landscape, one feels, is ever present to his view. Thus the book

<sup>1</sup> KONRAD FURRER: *Wanderungen durch das heilige Land*, second and improved edition, with 62 illustrations and 3 maps. Zurich, 1891.



is an extremely valuable aid to the understanding of the history, especially of the Old Testament."

These two works on Isaiah and on the Geography of Palestine give splendid promise for the future. Dr. Smith is still a young man, and much is to be expected from him. The one risk he runs is that which arises from early fame; the danger of being drawn into too many literary undertakings with resulting detriment to quality. Another contribution to the Expositor's Bible—on the Minor Prophets—from his pen, may shortly be looked for. I learn with pleasure that he is to visit America in the course of this year on a lecturing engagement. He is sure to receive an enthusiastic welcome from transatlantic audiences. I trust they will allow him to return to Old Scotland.